



MUMBAI

American Center
Bulletin

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MY AMERICA

Defining what it means to be an American has been a matter of discussion among Americans from the country's earliest days. Many of these efforts at looking inward, however, have a way of spinning outward to engage the rest of the world in a kind of dialogue. In his famous 1841 essay "Self-Reliance," for example, Ralph Waldo Emerson defines this virtue in opposition to the past, especially the European past. "Insist on yourself," Emerson said. "Never imitate."

One can see something of the same sensibility in the essays that follow in the section called "My America." Three young writers – of varying backgrounds, occupations, marital status – from around the United States have written about what they thought was important to tell international readers of their own age about this country. These essays, we thought, could provide a deeper, fuller picture of the U.S. and its people than may be conveyed through Hollywood movies or international TV news.

Many of these essays do begin by looking inward and then move on to consider the world. Jacqueline Morais Easley, a naturalized U.S. citizen, marvels at the diverse families that live on her block and explains her reasons for treasuring the way her daughter colors outside the lines. Korey London, an ex-serviceman, tells why he believes in defending this country. Eboo Patel, the Muslim head of an interfaith council in Chicago, tells why he thinks his religion and America's tradition of tolerance reinforce each other.

My America: Coloring Outside the Lines
by Jacqueline Easley

What do the faces of today's American family look like to you? Do you picture tall, athletic blond parents and their 2.5 children? Perhaps they stand in front of a pretty house on a well-manicured lawn surrounded by a white picket fence. Inside the home there are McDonald's bags on the kitchen counter, Coca-Colas in the refrigerator, and MTV playing in the background.

Sure, that's one type of American family. And I would be lying if I said I pictured that American family any differently as an 11-year-old girl living in the Philippines back in 1985. When my father came home one day from his job at the Asian Development Bank and announced we were moving to America, I was speechless ... and then exhilarated. The funny thing was that, at the time, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and MTV were the only parts of America that meant anything to me. And if these three symbols were any indication of what might be available in larger amounts,

then how fabulous America must be!

My family made that move to America. And 20 years later, here I am – a little less naïve, a little more savvy to media advertising, now favoring sushi over Filet-o-Fish and a good bottle of red wine over Coca-Cola. I don't even watch MTV anymore. But one thing hasn't changed: I remain a diehard fan of the United States.

I became an American citizen just five years ago when I was pregnant with my first child. I had married my college sweetheart and after a brief stint in Chicago, we were settling down in Maryland.

Today, as I do my best to raise two bold, beautiful, and rebellious little girls, I thank God that I am able to do it in the United States. And I still remember that day of citizenship well – reciting the pledge of allegiance, holding my hand over my heart, feeling both my baby kick inside of me and this overwhelming pride that I was officially becoming an American.

Five years later, the possibilities for my daughters are endless. We are quite aware that they live a comfortable, privileged life. While this is in part due to the hard work of my husband and myself, and our parents before us, it is also certainly due to sheer luck. My husband and I have drawn a fortunate lot in life. We were both born to loving parents who stressed the importance of family bonds, education, hard work, and commitment to others. These same values are now the backbone of our own little family and they propel us into the future.

My husband and I try to raise our children in ways that help them understand how privileged they are. We teach our girls to appreciate the talents and resources they have and do their best to use them for the betterment of others. If our lives have good food and much entertainment, they are also filled with charity and community service, children's books about different cultures and lifestyles, and endless motherly lectures on tolerance and diversity and compassion.

I applaud the fact that the American Dream is not a hokey, unattainable delusion; it is something that I see not just within my family, but among friends, neighbors, and strangers who strive for their version of this dream on a daily basis. To me, the faces of the American family include those blond, athletic parents with their 2.5 kids on their well-manicured lawns I mentioned earlier, but there are many, many other kinds of faces in my own personal spectrum as well.

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HOLIDAYS
April 6: Good Friday

A WORD FROM THE CENTER

The common theme we read about in these short essays is the diversity of America and the fact that nearly everyone in the United States has ancestors who came from somewhere else – Europe, Africa, Asia, Central and South America, etc. Today, with immigration as strong as it was 100 years ago, this diversity continues to shape the country and to make it stronger. This history, shared by millions of Americans inspired Colin Powell to write, “We are a land of immigrants: A nation that has been touched by every nation and we, in turn, touch every nation.” Whether people came because they believed in freedom, the openness of society, or because of the promise of economic opportunity, they brought their own unique cultures, values and customs with them, and have uniquely influenced the country they adopted.



Kristina M. Dunne
Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer

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There are the faces of the families at my co-op preschool: the petite red-headed Irish girl with her African-American husband and gorgeous kids; the two women raising three children together; the single mother who holds two jobs and raises a family on her own. There are other diverse faces on my neighborhood cul-de-sac: the Iraqi man married to an American woman with their two kids, our babysitter with her Italian father and Iranian mother, the Korean psychologist and his wife. Diversity is alive and rampant – at least in my life.

I cannot help but remember that initial act of rebellion over 200 years ago that cemented the independent spirit of this future “land of immigrants.” Under the umbrella of that independent spirit, millions of immigrants came to this country seeking shelter from intolerance, prejudice, and persecution – craving freedom and longing for the right to live authentic lives that were truly their own.

Sometimes I cringe when I think about the tragic, terrible parts of America’s fledgling history. But name me any country, culture, religion, or individual that does not have bad parts along with the good. And of course, there are things about this country that make me angry or embarrassed or disillusioned at times. Yet this is true of so many of the good things in life – marriage, parenthood, careers, relatives, friendships.

In the end, what saddens me about America is nothing compared to what amazes me about it: how much this young country has accomplished in so little time; how it champions democracy and human rights around the world; how it has attained economic superpower status; how it continues to dazzle with “bigger, better, brighter” ideas even as it doles out money to help those in need overseas.

I do question certain superficial values often associated with America and do my best to downplay these with my daughters, but I cherish even more the greater values of independence and diversity and freedom of expression that are alive and well in this country. And you can bet these take center stage as my husband and I navigate the complicated road of American parenthood.

Americans celebrate the individual, and as a result, our country is filled with some truly unique, bizarre, singularly talented, overly opinionated, exceptionally driven, multifaceted people. My daughters, with their own

distinct personalities, are various parts girly-girls, tomboy athletes, bookworms, budding artists, and compassionate citizens of the world. Of course I celebrate all these sides – and the ones not yet discovered – as best I can.

Americans also revere the act of self-exploration – discovering oneself, peeling back the layers to find your true essence, trying anything and everything at least once. Some may find this self-exploration a little indulgent. But when I see my five-year-old daughter coloring outside the lines, I do not try to correct her. Instead, I feel a sense of pride bubbling up inside that she’s unwilling to conform or follow the rules ... just yet. I admire her decision to reject borders in favor of something a little more messy, bohemian, and potentially progressive.

OK, it’s just a coloring book, but my point is that when Americans strive for the best, it’s not just because we are competitive but because we are constantly rebelling, pushing boundaries, taking risks. And we do this because we are encouraged to do this by virtue of the land in which we live and all that it stands for.

We all have the freedom to be shy or extroverted, brainy or ditz, stylish or schlumpy, old-fashioned or avant-garde. We can worry about what people think, conform, and fit in if we want to. Or we can care less about who’s watching, stand up and shout from the rooftops, make waves and push buttons, threaten the status quo. I look forward to seeing what my daughters choose to do. I may cringe at some of the things they take on in the spirit of self-expression. But for now, I’ll let them color outside the lines – better yet, I’ll cheer them on for it.

My America: An Airman’s Story by Korey London

When I was in elementary school, I remember listening to my teachers give history lessons about people from mostly European countries, who wanted to come to the United States to find a better way of life during the early 1900s. The people who were able to purchase tickets and make the trip to the United States were called immigrants. The rumor was that America was the land of opportunity and had streets paved with gold. I’ve never come across any of those streets, but there’s always been plenty of opportunity in this country for those willing to take advantage of it.

I also remember history lessons about people who were captured on the west coast of Africa and shipped to the United States, South America, and the Caribbean Islands in the slave trade. I remember hearing about the horrible living conditions that those Africans experienced on the long crossing to the New World. I also remember the stories of cruelty that the Africans endured before the institution of slavery was abolished in the United States. I wondered how anyone could survive such difficult times. But they did. Sometimes, when I look at my own black skin, I wonder if I could have survived in those conditions. Then I thank God I didn’t have to go through what my ancestors did.

So when I think of America, I often think of past generations of people who came to the United States in search of opportunities to improve their lives and also those who were brought here under the bondage of slavery and endured until better days came. Both groups overcame hardships and worked to prepare the younger generations to take advantage of better opportunities once they arrived.

The question, “What is an American?” is kind of tricky because, with the exception of Native Americans, we all come from countries outside the

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United States or at least our ancestors do.

My family is no different. My parents are from two tiny islands in the Caribbean West Indies. My mom is from Guadeloupe and my dad is from St. Maarten. They first met each other in St. Maarten when they were teenagers. They moved to the United States at different times in the late 1960s. When my mom arrived in New York and settled in, she found out that my dad was already here. Somehow she was able to find him and the rest, as they say, is history.

My dad eventually joined the U.S. Army and served for 20 years. His military career provided our family with a fairly comfortable life and allowed us to see parts of the world we probably wouldn't have visited otherwise. My brother enlisted in the U.S. Air Force when I was still in high school and I joined the Air Force after a year of college. At this point I have finished my commitment to the military and I'm almost finished with my college education, which was paid for by the military. In addition to the education I'm getting, I have several positive memories from serving my country in the U.S. Air Force.

I was fortunate enough to have one of the best jobs in the Air Force – working in the public affairs offices putting base newspapers together. The job allowed me to learn what other airmen in the service were doing to make sure the United States was safe and that help was available to those in need.

One of the more memorable experiences was when I traveled to a small remote village inside the Arctic Circle to help media from Anchorage, Alaska, cover a story about an airlift squadron's delivery of power generators and other supplies to the Alaskan Natives who lived there. The delivery was an annual event that took place a few weeks before Christmas. The best part was seeing how appreciative the people in that village were to receive the supplies and equipment. Helping that village of Alaskan Natives was a typical day's work to the airmen involved in making the delivery. Those airmen were living the Air Force core values: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All That We Do.

That's why it's difficult for me to watch the news or read a newspaper to find out about American soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen who've been killed in Iraq. I consider myself a patriot of the United States and joined the military to serve and protect my country, but my greatest reason for joining the military wasn't to go out and kill people. I wanted to earn money for my education and receive training for a career outside of the military. That's the reason a lot of the airmen I served with told me they joined the military. When I see those reports about the members of the military who've lost their lives, I know that it could have just as easily been me returning home in one of those body bags. But that's part of the sacrifice this new generation of military men and women have made so future generations won't have to endure another September 11 disaster.

My America: The New World by Eboo Patel

I love America not because I am under the illusion that it is perfect, but because it allows me – the child of Muslim immigrants from India – to participate in its progress, to carve a place in its promise, to play a role in its possibility.

John Winthrop, one of the earliest European settlers in America, gave voice to this sense of possibility. He told his compatriots that their

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NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY

A Select Webliography on Diversity in America

<http://www.abanet.org/minorities/>

American Bar Association – Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession

<http://www.apsanet.org/~rep/>

American Political Science Association – Race and Ethnicity Online

<http://www.dtui.com/>

Diversity Training University International

<http://www.diversityweb.org/>

DiversityWeb

<http://www.pluralism.org/>

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University

<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/society/diverse.htm>

infoUSA – Diversity and Immigration

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/learn/start/inres/ushist/ethnic.html>

The Library of Congress – Ethnic & Multicultural History

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/browse/ListSome.php?category=Immigration>

The Library of Congress – American Memory – Immigration

<http://www.migrationinformation.org/>

Migration Policy Institute – Migration Information Source

<http://www.mcadc.org/>

MultiCultural Development Center

<http://www.nmci.org/>

National MultiCultural Institute – Leading with Diversity

<http://www.nameorg.org/>

National Association for Multicultural Education

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/>

U.S. Department of Justice – Civil Rights Division

<http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/discrimination/ethnicdisc.htm>

U.S. Department of Labor – Equal Employment Opportunity

http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/history_geography_and_population/population_and_diversity.html

U.S. Department of State – Bureau of International Information Programs – Population and Diversity

<http://www.eeoc.gov/>

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

<http://www.usccr.gov/>

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

<http://vos.ucsb.edu/browse.asp?id=2721>

University of California, Santa Barbara – Voice of the Shuttle – Minority Studies

Note: Internet sites included in this listing, other than those of the U.S. Government, should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

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society would be like a city upon a hill, a beacon for the world. It was a hope rooted in Winthrop's Christian faith, and no doubt he imagined his city on a hill with a steeple in the center. Throughout the centuries, America has remained a deeply religious country, while at the same time becoming a remarkably plural one. Indeed, we are the most religiously devout nation in the West and the most religiously diverse country in the world. The steeple at the center of the city on a hill is now surrounded by the minaret of Muslim mosques, the Hebrew script of Jewish synagogues, the chanting of Buddhist sangas, and the statues of Hindu temples. In fact, there are now more Muslims in America than Episcopalians, the faith professed by many of America's Founding Fathers.

One hundred years ago, the great African-American scholar W.E.B. DuBois warned that the problem of the century would be the color line. The 21st century might well be dominated by a different line – the faith line. From Northern Ireland to South Asia, the Middle East to Middle America, people are condemning, coercing, and killing in the name of God. The most pressing questions for my country (America), my religion (Islam), and all God's people may well be these: How will people who may have different ideas of heaven interact together on earth? Will the steeple, the minaret, the synagogue, the temple, and the sanga learn to share space in a new city on a hill?

I think the American ethos – mixing tolerance and reverence – may have something special to contribute to this issue.

America is a grand gathering of souls, the vast majority from elsewhere. The American genius lies in allowing these souls to contribute their texture to the American tradition, to add new notes to the American song.

I am an American with a Muslim soul. My soul carries a long history of heroes, movements, and civilizations that sought to submit to the will of God. My soul listened as the Prophet Muhammad preached the central messages of Islam, tazaarqa and tawhid, compassionate justice and the oneness of God. In the Middle Ages, my soul spread to the East and West, praying in the mosques and studying in the libraries of the great medieval Muslim cities of Cairo, Baghdad, and Cordoba. My soul whirled with Rumi, read Aristotle with Averroes, traveled through Central Asia with Nasir Khusrow. In the colonial era, my Muslim soul was stirred to justice. It marched with Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgars in their satyagraha to free India. It stood with Farid Esack, Ebrahim Moosa, Rahid Omar, and the Muslim Youth Movement in their struggle for a multicultural South Africa.

In one eye I carry this ancient Muslim vision of pluralism, in the other eye I carry the American promise. And in my heart, I pray that we make real this possibility: a city on a hill where different religious communities respectfully share space and collectively serve the common good; a world where diverse nations and peoples come to know one another in a spirit of brotherhood and righteousness; a century in which we achieve a common life together.

The American Center acknowledges the following web sites in compiling this essay:

<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0606/ijse/myamerica.htm>

<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0606/ijse/easley.htm>

<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0606/ijse/easley.htm>

<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0606/ijse/patel.htm>

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FILMS THIS MONTH

PLURALISM AND DIVERSITY IN AMERICA

Friday, April 13 *I Remember Mama* (1948, b/w, 134 mins)

Friday, April 20 *Crossing Delancey* (1988, color, 97 mins)

Friday, April 27 *The Mambo Kings* (1992, color, 105 mins)

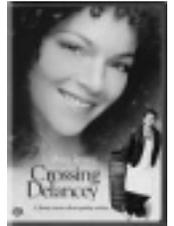
American Center Auditorium

3:30 and 6:30 p.m.



Sentimental family drama about a Norwegian-American brood living in turn-of-the-century San Francisco. Sentimental favorite stars Irene Dunne, Barbara Bel Geddes, Philip Dorn and Oscar Homolka; directed by George Stevens.

A winning and heartfelt romantic comedy, with Amy Irving as a young Jewish New Yorker trying to improve her social status and meet Mr. Right, but fixed up by her grandmother and a matchmaker with likable pickle salesman Peter Riegert. Jeroen Krabbe, Reizl Bozyk and Sylvia Miles costar.



An exhilarating, music-filled drama based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about two musical Cuban brothers who arrive in 1950s America with hopes of making it big in the world of Mambo music. Armand Assante, Antonio Banderas, Cathy Moriarty, Maruschka Detmers and Talisa Soto star in this seductive film that also features appearances by Celia Cruz, Tito Puente and Desi Arnaz, Jr.

MUMBAI MONDAYS

**A Discussion on
The Changing Face of Citizenship
and Immigration Services: From INS to DHS
led by Swati Patel**

Monday, April 16

American Center Auditorium

6:00 p.m.

Swati Patel joined the Foreign Service in November 2003 as a Public Diplomacy coned officer and served her first tour at the U.S. Embassy in Honduras as a Consular – Political/Military Officer. Prior to joining the State Department, Swati worked as a District Adjudication Officer for the Department of Justice/Immigration and Naturalization Service and continued working in the same capacity with the Department of Homeland Security/Citizenship and Immigration Services. She started working with the federal government at the Social Security Administration. Swati has a B.A. in International Relations, with concentrations in Health and the Developing World, and a minor in Political Science. She is a native speaker of Gujarati and also speaks Spanish, Hindi, and can speak some Urdu.

Admission to all American Center programs, restricted to persons over 16, will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Please bring the envelope containing this issue of the bulletin for admission (maximum two persons). The auditorium doors will open 30 minutes before the start of the program.